United Nations

Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Report on the twentieth session (12–21 April 2021)

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Committee of Experts on Public Administration

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Note

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of letters combined with figures. Mention of such a symbol indicates a reference to a United Nations document.

Summary

The Committee of Experts on Public Administration held its twentieth session from 12 to 21 April 2021 using a virtual platform. The overall theme was "Building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals".

One of the key messages of the Committee was that recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals should not be seen as sequential or separate. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provided a road map to recovery from the pandemic and build resilience to future shocks. Achieving sustainable development and strengthening resilience required a long-term perspective in policymaking together with institution-building at all levels, based on effective governance for sustainable development, and a steadfast commitment to promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Azerbaijan, Colombia and Indonesia gave presentations on various institutional issues as part of an interactive dialogue with the experts.

The Committee emphasized that transparent, accountable and participatory management of public finances was a key element of effective governance, and even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Governments around the world face decreasing revenues and increasing expenditures. Extraordinary circumstances could not be an excuse for a lack of transparency, accountability and participation. Such decisions would impact the effectiveness of public spending and public service provision, fairness in the distribution of public funds, political dynamics and the well-being of people, especially of vulnerable and excluded groups, including refugees and displaced persons, all together affecting implementation of the Goals.

The Committee underscored the need for ownership of the 11 principles of effective governance to accelerate action on building strong institutions and action. For this to happen, mechanisms were needed to support a culture of realizing the principles at all levels and among both older and younger generations of public sector workers. In addition, greater effort could be made to promote awareness among parliamentarians and permanent secretaries with an emphasis on encouraging "ministerial excellence" and leadership development to enable implementation.

The Committee recommended that national budgets be aligned with the Goals, which in most cases required that the budgets be reorganized, based on programmes and activities. Implementing the Goals by incorporating them into national budgeting systems required a strategic decision by political leaders, as well as technical efforts. Reorganization of budgets from a traditional format to activity-based budgeting and programme budgeting was a key step that would enable the Government to allocate funds toward the achievement of the Goals and to monitor outcomes. Better budgeting in the context of the Goals entailed participation, such as by informing and engaging legislatures, supreme audit institutions, civil society and the public. Budget transparency and literacy were enablers for public participation throughout the budget process.

The Committee stressed that the potential of sustainable public procurement was underutilized. Public procurement represented, on average, 13 to 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). By leveraging public expenditure, Governments could lead by example, stimulating markets for sustainable products and services and helping steer society towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns. Market mechanisms could be used to expand procurement options but required inspection and enforcement along with the capacity in the public sector to support them. Supreme

audit institutions could play a crucial role in monitoring progress at the national level and adequate legislation should be in place to do so effectively.

The Committee highlighted that the pandemic had accelerated the trend of digitalization and flexible work in the public sector and had opened up possibilities for new work modalities, with the use of technology, and new types of contracts. Benefits and compensation schemes and reasonable work contracts for all types of frontline workers should reflect the changing nature of public sector work and the risks that frontline workers faced. New ways of working had also exposed inequalities and digital divides across the public sector workforce. Equal opportunities should be given for the provision of digital capacity with special attention to the local level. For sustainable recovery from the pandemic, public services should be delivered with a focus on citizen-centricity and workforce management in harmony with people's expectations.

The Committee also observed that the pandemic was likely to exacerbate existing challenges in conflict-affected countries and increase pressure on already struggling institutions. Sexual and gender-based violence had increased due to the pandemic where security forces were empowered and had the opportunity to abuse their position. The proactive leadership of Governments was key to the recovery from the pandemic and should be free of political considerations. Clear, verified information backed up by evidence was essential to overcoming challenges related to fake news and mistrust of government. Local leaders and civil society organizations on the ground remained critical partners both in terms of peacebuilding and aiding vaccination programmes that rely on trust and legitimacy.

The Committee adopted a draft resolution and a draft decision for the consideration of the Economic and Social Council. The Committee also reaffirmed its contribution to the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development on the 2021 theme from a governance and public administration perspective.

Contents

Chapter I

Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention

A. Draft resolution recommended for adoption by the Economic and Social Council

1.   The Committee of Experts on Public Administration recommends that the Economic and Social Council review and adopt the following draft resolution:

Report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on its twentieth session

The Economic and Social Council,

Recalling its resolutions 2019/26 of 23 July 2019, 2020/21 of 22 July 2020 and other related resolutions on public administration and development, in which it affirmed that service to citizens should be at the centre of transforming public administration and that the foundations of sustainable development at all levels include transparent, participatory and accountable governance and a professional, ethical, responsive and information and communications technology-enabled public administration,

Reaffirming General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development",

Reaffirming also General Assembly resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015 on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development,

Reaffirming further the outcome document, entitled "New Urban Agenda", adopted by the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), held in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016, [1]

Recalling General Assembly resolution 69/327 of 14 September 2015, in which the Assembly reaffirmed the importance of freedom, human rights, national sovereignty, good governance, the rule of law, peace and security, combating corruption at all levels and in all its forms, and effective, accountable and inclusive democratic institutions at the subnational, national and international levels as central to enabling inclusive and accountable public services for sustainable development,

Referring to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, [2] which entered into force on 14 December 2005,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 75/202 of 21 December 2020, in which the Assembly recognized the need to harness the potential of information and communications technologies as critical enablers of sustainable development and to overcome digital divides, and stressing that capacity-building for the productive use of such technologies should be given due consideration in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda,

Recalling also General Assembly resolution 69/228 of 19 December 2014 on promoting and fostering the efficiency, accountability, effectiveness and transparency

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[1] General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex.
[2] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2349, No. 42146.

of public administration by strengthening supreme audit institutions, in which the Assembly emphasized that efficient, accountable, effective and transparent public administration has a key role to play in the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals,

Recalling further General Assembly resolution 74/236 of 19 December 2019 on human resources development,

Referring to General Assembly resolution 74/270 of 2 April 2020, in which the Assembly recognized the unprecedented effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including the severe disruption to societies and economies, as well as to global travel and commerce, and the devastating impact on the livelihood of people, and reaffirmed its full commitment to the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development,

Recognizing the role of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration in providing policy advice and programmatic guidance to the Economic and Social Council on issues related to governance and public administration, and the relevance of the work of the Committee to the implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda,

1.   *Takes note* of the report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on its twentieth session,[3] and expresses its appreciation for the work done by the Committee on building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in accordance with the 2021 theme of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development;

2.   *Invites* the Committee to continue to place the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[4] at the centre of its work and to continue to advise the Council on how public administrations can support the implementation and progress reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals;

3.   *Welcomes* the contribution of the Committee to the high-level political forum, and reaffirms that the principle of leaving no one behind should be a core principle of public administration;

Building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

4.   *Reiterates* the critical role of institutions in the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, calls for institutions to develop more creative, flexible and integrated ways of working to this end, and notes that implementing the Goals does not necessarily require the creation of new institutions;

5.   *Recalls* the importance of a timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and urges Governments to address the structural and procedural weaknesses in institutions at all levels that may be hindering the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets and pursue bold policy reforms to accelerate achievement of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development;

6.   *Recognizes* that achieving sustainable development and strengthening resilience require a long-term perspective in public policymaking, together with institution-building at all levels, based on effective governance for sustainable

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[3] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2021, Supplement No. 24* (E/2021/44).
[4] General Assembly resolution 70/1.

development, as well as a steadfast commitment to promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies;

7. *Also recognizes* that public administration entities are essential partners in developing adequate institutional mechanisms and ensuring that competences, skills and behaviours in the workforce are directed to the effective implementation of mission-oriented objectives based on the Sustainable Development Goals, and encourages Governments to incorporate their work on building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels into national planning processes, policies and strategies;

8. *Reaffirms* the need for pragmatic ongoing improvements in national and local governance capabilities to achieve the 2030 Agenda and other international agreements, and encourages Governments at all levels to apply the principles of effective governance for sustainable development,[5] endorsed by the Council in its resolution 2018/12 of 2 July 2018, to all public institutions and in support of the implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals, taking into account different governance structures, national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities;

9. *Encourages* the Committee to continue to identify and review related technical guidelines to operationalize the principles, including from sectoral perspectives, and to further engage the relevant United Nations organizations, regional organizations and professional and academic communities in this regard, in an inclusive manner, together with all relevant stakeholders;

10. *Encourages* Governments to accelerate action to increase transparency and equal participation in the budgeting process, establish transparent public procurement frameworks as a strategic tool to reinforce sustainable development, and strengthen national control mechanisms, such as supreme audit institutions, along with other independent oversight institutions, as appropriate, in auditing budget performance, and to embed commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals in budgetary and financial processes at the national and subnational levels by adopting practices to monitor and report on the use of public financial resources in support of the Goals, such as reorganizing budgets, based on programmes and activities, and mapping and tracking budgetary contributions to each Goal;

11. *Also encourages* Governments to leverage public expenditure to stimulate markets for sustainable products and services and help steer society towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns and to enhance efforts to build the requisite capacity for the effective management of sustainable public procurement at all levels;

12. *Recalls* that building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels calls for a comprehensive understanding of the scope and capabilities of the public sector workforce, recognizes that new modalities of work are emerging in many countries, and encourages Governments to develop appropriate schemes for managing flexible work and contract work in the public sector, review public sector labour laws to reflect flexible work arrangements, develop protocols and guidelines for performance assessment in flexible work regimes, and accelerate efforts to enhance digital skills in the context of public sector workforce planning at both the national and subnational levels;

13. *Welcomes* the continuing work of the Committee on building strong institutions for sustainable development in countries affected by conflict, and looks

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[5] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2018, Supplement No. 24* (E/2018/44), chap. III, sect. B, para. 31.

forward to the Committee's further engagement in promoting effective governance for sustainable development in such situations and its contribution to the work of the Peacebuilding Commission;

Follow-up

14. *Requests* the Committee, at its twenty-first session, to be held from 4 to 8 April 2022, to examine and make recommendations on the theme of the 2022 session of the Council and the 2022 high-level political forum and to contribute to the review of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16, giving particular attention to the cross-cutting nature of all the Goals;

15. *Invites* the Committee to continue to advise on approaches and practices related to the institutions, policies and arrangements being established to promote the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, bearing in mind that the specific contexts and situations of countries differ widely, as well as to advise on making institutions effective, accountable and inclusive;

16. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the present resolution fully into account in the work of the Organization, inter alia, in addressing gaps in research and analysis and in responding to the capacity development needs of Member States for building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels in pursuit of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

17. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to continue to promote and support innovation and excellence in public services for sustainable development through the United Nations Public Service Awards;

18. *Further requests* the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of and follow-up to the present resolution through the established working methods of the Committee.

B. Draft decision recommended for adoption by the Economic and Social Council

2. Bearing in mind the theme of the 2022 session of the Economic and Social Council and of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration recommends that the Council review and adopt the following draft decision:

Dates and provisional agenda of the twenty-first session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

The Economic and Social Council:

(a) Decides that the twenty-first session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration will be held at United Nations Headquarters from 4 to 8 April 2022;

(b) Approves the provisional agenda of the twenty-first session of the Committee as set out below:

1. Election of officers.

2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.

3. Governance and public administration aspects of the theme of the 2022 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

4.   Building strong institutions to combat climate change and its impacts and for the sustainable management, protection and restoration of natural resources.

5.   Issues of governance and institution-building in conflict-affected countries.

6.   Application of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development at the subnational level.

7.   Issues in public financial management and budgeting for the Sustainable Development Goals.

8.   Public sector workforce matters.

9.   Issues in digital government.

10.   Dialogue with voluntary national review countries on institutional aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 16.

11.   Provisional agenda of the twenty-second session of the Committee.

12.   Adoption of the report of the Committee on its twenty-first session.

(c)   Decides that documentation in support of the provisional agenda should continue to be prepared through the established working methods of the Committee.

C.   Contribution of the Committee to the high-level political forum on sustainable development

3.   The Committee would like to draw the attention of the Economic and Social Council to its contribution to the thematic review of the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development on the subject of building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, conveyed to the President of the Council as Chair of the high-level political forum on 10 March 2021.[1] The Committee further examined the 2021 theme from a governance and public administration perspective at its twentieth session.

4.   One of the key messages of the Committee was that recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals are not sequential or separate. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a road map to recovery from the pandemic and build resilience to future shocks. Achieving sustainable development and strengthening resilience require a long-term perspective in policymaking together with institution-building at all levels, based on the principles of effective governance for sustainable development,[2] and a steadfast commitment to promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

5.   To address the needs of those who are left behind, including women, their participation in decision-making processes and leadership roles is imperative. The promotion of an inclusive governance model allows co-creation and collaboration with stakeholders, as well as women's leadership at the subnational and national levels, at which plans, policies and programmes provide an inclusive perspective. All over the world, Governments are reinventing themselves in order to be ready for a

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[1] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27306CEPA_contribution_to_2021_HLPF.pdf.

[2] For the full text of the principles, see E/2018/44-E/C.16/2018/8, para. 31.

future in which they will be able to perform collaborative forms of leadership in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

6. The Committee went on to stress that transparent, accountable and participatory management of public finances is a key element of effective governance, and even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Governments around the world face decreasing revenues and increasing expenditures. Extraordinary circumstances, in which decisions are often made overnight, could not be an excuse for a lack of transparency, accountability and participation. Such decisions may impact the effectiveness of public spending and public service provision, fairness in the distribution of public funds, future fiscal sustainability and indebtedness and political dynamics, not to mention the well-being of people, especially of vulnerable and excluded groups, including refugees and displaced persons, all together affecting implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. The Committee underscored that the huge potential of sustainable public procurement is still underutilized. By leveraging the purchasing power of public administration to guide products and services towards sustainability, Governments can lead by example and stimulate the markets for sustainable products. Public procurement represents, on average, 13 to 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Creating the legal conditions for sustainable public procurement, and learning lessons from countries that are forerunners, supports the implementation of many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

8. The quality of public administration and governance ought to be an element of national and subnational strategic policies on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Entities responsible for governance and public administration, including governmental schools and training institutes, are often not part of the 2030 Agenda policy framework, yet they are essential partners for developing adequate institutional mechanisms and ensuring that competences, skills and behaviours in the workforce are directed to the effective implementation of mission-oriented objectives based on the Goals.

9. Economic shocks as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have further intensified the vulnerabilities of countries in conflict and post-conflict countries in a way that weakens their capacity to gain momentum for the attainment of most of the targets of the Goals. Peace, security and conflict management remain critical to the establishment of enabling conditions and an enabling environment for the advancement of the Goals. Countries in conflict and post-conflict countries therefore need redoubled development partnership efforts to recover from the ravages of the pandemic and return to the path to recovery.

10. The Committee engaged in a dialogue with three voluntary national review countries with the objective of promoting direct interaction with interested countries on the institutional aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 16. Azerbaijan, Colombia and Indonesia each presented concrete experiences for discussion. The discussion illustrated that much progress is being made on the quality of national public administration and governance, with contextualized solutions and priorities, and that exchange of experiences between countries can catalyse progress.

11. Further observations and conclusions pertaining to the issues raised in the contribution of the Committee to the Forum can be found in chapter III of the present report.

Chapter II
Organization of the session

A. Work of the session

12. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration, established by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2001/45, consists of 24 experts appointed in their personal capacity by the Council upon nomination by the Secretary-General. Pursuant to Council resolution 2020/3, on revised working arrangements for the 2020 session of the Economic and Social Council and sessions of its subsidiary bodies and decision 2021/215, on the dates of the twentieth session of the Committee, and taking into account decision 2021/213, on the procedure for taking decisions of the sessional bodies and the subsidiary organs of the Economic and Social Council during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic at the 2021 session of the Council, the Committee held its twentieth session in a virtual format from 12 to 21 April 2021 (see annex II).

13. The Committee adopted its draft report on the session on 21 April 2021.

B. Agenda

14. The agenda of the twentieth session of the Committee was as follows:

    1. Election of officers.

    2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.

    3. Governance and public administration aspects of the theme of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

    4. Dialogue with voluntary national review countries on institutional aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 16.

    5. Strengthening the analytical basis for reform policies based on the principles of effective governance for sustainable development.

    6. Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national and subnational budgeting and financial management.

    7. Sustainable public procurement in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

    8. Impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on essential workers in the public sector.

    9. Building strong institutions for sustainable development in conflict-affected countries.

    10. Provisional agenda for the twenty-first session of the Committee.

    11. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its twentieth session.

C. Election of officers

15.   The following members served as officers of the Committee during the twentieth session:

Chair:
   Geraldine J. Fraser-Moleketi (South Africa)

Vice-Chairs:
   Geert Bouckaert (Belgium)
   Louis Meuleman (Netherlands)
   Lamia Moubayed Bissat (Lebanon)

Rapporteur:
   Henry Sardaryan (Russian Federation)

Chapter III

Building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

A. Strengthening the analytical basis for reform policies based on the principles of effective governance for sustainable development

Promoting ownership of the principles to accelerate action on the Sustainable Development Goals

16.   The Committee underscored the need for ownership of the principles to accelerate action on building strong institutions and action on the Sustainable Development Goals. For this to happen, mechanisms were needed to support a culture of realizing the principles at all levels and among both older and younger generations of public sector workers. As observed in previous sessions, addressing public sector workforce capability gaps called for strengthening related training programmes, peer-to-peer learning and exchange of good practices within and across countries and provision of basic training on the Goals for all public sector workers. Attention to subnational levels in professional development and training should receive greater attention, given that local authorities were the main operational levels of government. In addition, greater effort could be made to promote awareness among parliamentarians and permanent secretaries, with an emphasis on encouraging "ministerial excellence" and leadership development to enable implementation.

Regional studies on effective governance for sustainable development

17.   The Committee welcomed the recent initiative of the African Peer Review Mechanism to undertake a baseline study of the implementation of the principles in Africa and recalled that the purpose of the study was to establish the experiences and state of readiness of Governments in Africa to apply the principles of effective governance for sustainable development in national contexts. The forthcoming study would serve to recommend to Governments in Africa steps towards building resilient, inclusive and accountable public institutions and sharing best institutional practices among States members of the African Union.

18.   The Committee took note of an executive summary of the study, in which the African Peer Review Mechanism recognized the significance of the principles to the expanded mandate of the Mechanism, namely that of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and the 2030 Agenda. The Mechanism would also report in the study on the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the principles and present case studies on policy design and implementation in a selection of study countries. The Committee considered the case of Kenya in some depth, noting the progress that had been made in applying the principles, which were grounded in the basic law of the country, throughout the public sector, while observing the budgetary impact of a shift to emergency response measures and the consequent constraint on efforts to strengthen oversight functions, sound policymaking, integrity, transparency and stakeholder participation.

19.   The Committee also welcomed a draft study on the implementation of the principles in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which concluded that many of the problems and obstacles of institution-building in the region had common ground and might be dealt with by using similar tools and approaches. The Committee noted

study observations regarding progress made in transparency in the Russian Federation through the digitalization of public services, as well as the action taken by the Government to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic with the engagement of the private sector. It was further reported in the study that different countries in the region faced challenges in the form of an apparent lack of expertise and resources in the public sector, sometimes associated with arbitrariness in recruitment, an inflated State apparatus, inadequate professionalism of public servants and absence of human resource management systems. Lack of collaboration among public authorities had also been identified as a concern in some countries where interdepartmental coordination and dialogue among different governmental actors was limited. Issues of subsidiarity and sharing of responsibilities and resources among levels of government were a concern. The Committee took note of study findings suggesting that sound policymaking was also a challenge in the region, with low levels of statistical information including disaggregated data on gender and age, as well as lack of software for data analysis. The development of unified registers of information and databases accessible to all public entities was thought to be a way forward.

Review of technical guidance

20.   The Committee took note of recent efforts to promote operationalization of the principles by the Secretariat in collaboration with the members. The Committee encouraged the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to continue to support their operationalization and further engage the relevant United Nations organizations, regional organizations and professional and academic communities in this regard. Governmental schools and training institutes of all kinds also had an important role to play, inter alia by raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and the principles and including related skills development in training programmes. Particular attention was given to the principle of sound policymaking, given the long-standing challenges for public institutions and sustainable development such as policy integration, risk management, stakeholder engagement and monitoring and evaluation.

21.   Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, long-term policymaking would be crucial to ensure the resilience of public institutions, and strategic planning and foresight was key in that regard. Building on the Committee's contribution to the high-level political forum on sustainable development and referring to the guidance note on strategic planning and foresight, the Committee underscored that there was, however, a tension in public administration between responding to urgent and important needs and, at the same time, attempting to deliver on longer-term policy objectives. Discretionary management practices could help strike a balance between transactional and strategic approaches to government functions in some cases. In general, however, structural challenges in the design of institutions tend to militate against a strategic mindset in the public sector. Some Governments have established offices responsible for strategic foresight to overcome this challenge, which could serve as examples for others.

22.   The Committee concluded that more in-depth consideration of regional studies could be useful, as could further discussion of the public sector situation and trends in specific practice areas, such as strategic foresight, building on the work of past sessions and using the strategy guidance notes as a point of reference where applicable.

B. Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national and subnational budgeting and financial management

Using the Sustainable Development Goals as a framework for public expenditure

23. The Committee stressed that national budgets need to be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals to accelerate progress towards their achievement, which in most cases required that the budgets be reorganized, based on programmes and activities. Implementing the Goals by incorporating them into national budgeting systems required a strategic decision by political leaders, as well as technical efforts. Reorganization of budget from traditional format to activity-based budgeting and programme budgeting is a key step that enables the Government to allocate funds toward the achievement of the Goals and to monitor outcomes.

24. Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national budgetary processes improves budget coherence, increases accountability and transparency and allows greater and comparability of national budgets. Better budgeting in the context of the Goals entails participation, such as by informing and engaging legislatures, supreme audit institutions, civil society and the public. Budget transparency and literacy are enablers for public participation throughout the budget process. Only a small number of countries have taken the critical step of fully embedding the Goals into national budgetary mechanisms and redesigning their annual and longer-term integrated financial plans around the achievement of the Goals. It is also important for budgets to provide information on allocations, where relevant, by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics, so as to contribute to the assessment of the impact of policies on different groups.

25. The Committee observed that using the Goals as a framework for public expenditure might be easier if the country was relatively small but committed; but for larger countries with more disparities, implementing the Goals at the subnational level might be the priority. By the same token, such processes might be more difficult to manage in low-income countries and/or wherever the financial and professional capacities were lacking. Those countries should be provided with international support.

The case of Cabo Verde

26. The Committee noted that Cabo Verde had explicitly prioritized the Sustainable Development Goals in its budgetary, financial and accounting systems. More recently, it had focused on integrating the Goals into its national planning and budgeting, expenditure and the monitoring of progress and outcomes. These efforts had considerable results in reducing extreme poverty, increased adult literacy and extended life expectancy.

27. Cabo Verde had made notable progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and there were three main pillars of the approach taken by the Government. First, the country maintained robust institutions and had invested in strengthening its institutional capacity to promote sustainable and inclusive development in accordance with Goal 16. That created an environment conducive to focusing on the Goals as a national priority. Second, Cabo Verde had adopted specific processes, systems, methods, techniques and standards that made the institutional support effective. For example, it had embraced planning, programming, budgeting and evaluation systems, cost accounting, performance budgeting, results-based management and financial tracking tools to enable the Government to set realistic performance goals, monitor spending, measure performance and make adjustments.

Third, its leaders had been dedicated to those efforts and had embraced big data and intensive data analysis to track and monitor investment and performance. In addition, the efforts had been conducted transparently.

Related issues in public financial management

28. The Committee further noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting global recession were undermining fiscal and external balances. Even before the pandemic, financing was a key challenge in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Some of the common issues that Governments faced from an administrative perspective included: the subordination of local allocation objectives to national authority owing to limited integration of Goal targets into local government programmes; a lack of horizontal and vertical policy coherence in national development plans and programmes; a focus on the short term by public officials, which hindered long-term planning; limited reliable and up-to-date financial management information systems and/or data interoperability; and difficulties with budget credibility.

C. Sustainable public procurement in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

Sustainable public procurement as a strategic enabler of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

29. The Committee underscored that sustainable public procurement, explicitly mentioned in Sustainable Development Goal target 12.7, had huge potential as an enabler of governmental efforts to deliver the Goals. The main purpose of sustainable public procurement was to strike a balance between the environmental, social and economic aspects of consumption and production and, more specifically, to lend greater weight to social and environmental factors in the purchasing decisions of manufacturers, suppliers and consumers. Public procurement represented, on average, 13 per cent to 20 per cent of GDP. Given the large scale of public investment in most countries, the application of sustainability criteria in public procurement could be one of the most impactful tools towards sustainable development. Through the leveraging of public expenditure, sustainable public procurement enabled Governments to lead by example, stimulating markets for sustainable products and services and helping steer society towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

30. Sustainable public procurement was a strategic policy instrument in efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. Sufficient market analysis and market intelligence would be needed to succeed, combined with an understanding of the settings in which procurement was carried out. Such an analysis should take into account questions of political economy, such as existing power relationships, competing interests and the potential for corruption in procurement processes and questions of capacity.

Expanding sustainable procurement options

31. The Committee observed that the take-up of sustainable public procurement was hindered by resource considerations. Only 1 per cent of official development assistance was earmarked for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 12, with the economic impact of the pandemic expected to exacerbate the situation. A significant challenge was that sustainable products were often more expensive than unsustainable alternatives, owing to internalization of social and environmental costs and more limited supply.

32. Market mechanisms, such as eco-labelling, could be used to expand procurement options but also came at a cost as they required inspection and enforcement mechanisms across supply chains. The least developed countries faced particular challenges in sourcing products that met the requirements of sustainable production and were unlikely to have the capacity to introduce needed market reforms. One approach could be to prioritize markets for product groups that were available locally, either for domestic consumption or for export, with the aim of making the country a recognized leader in sustainable production in a particular industry.

Enhancing capacity to manage sustainable public procurement

33. The Committee noted that existing institutional mechanisms were often unable to ensure the mainstreaming of sustainable factors in procurement processes in all sectors and at all levels of administration. Various steps had been taken at the national level to build capacity, for example using electronic systems to monitor public procurement performance of public entities and track total expenditures on sustainable products. A commitment to sustainable public procurement in a country's statutes was also found to be useful, for example by establishing primary and secondary requirements for public procurement. Primary objectives could be that a procurement system must be fair, equitable, transparent, competitive and cost effective. Secondary objectives could call for ensuring that procurement reflected Goals linked to resource efficiency, climate change, social responsibility and economic resilience, for example through preferential treatment of certain categories of persons in the allocation of contracts to address wider social development objectives.

34. Strengthening the capacity to manage sustainable public procurement would also be crucial. Developing public procurement as a profession could be beneficial, specifically in addressing substantial capability gaps in the day-to-day management of contracts, including the proper specification of sustainability requirements and subsequent product verification. Skill sets could be enhanced through targeted training, for example as part of academic programmes, guidance and resources, helpdesks, and the use of certifications and eco-labels, with a view to closing information gaps and ensuring that procurers were fully aware of the sustainable public procurement methods and tools available to them. Peer-to-peer leaning and use of digital tools such as e-procurement systems could also support sustainable public procurement practices. High-level political buy-in, top management support and awareness among key stakeholders were crucial in instigating positive behavioural changes in support of sustainable public procurement.

35. Matching national and subnational governance styles to sustainable public procurement mechanisms was critical to engaging with all relevant stakeholders. For instance, a network style of governance, whereby Governments promote collaboration among businesses, public institutions, local authorities and civil society organizations and support it as a political priority. Regulatory approaches could help to manage supply chains, for example, by having a law to enforce sustainable public procurement with measurable indicators. It was important to look at how goods and services are produced and, in particular, to promote the use of sustainably sourced material and resource efficiency in production methods. Sustainable public procurement should take into account human rights, equity and fair labour practices.

36. The Committee noted that progress on sustainable public procurement is most effective when a mandatory framework is created that can be combined with voluntary approaches. For example, it could be voluntary to use sustainable public procurement, but at the same time obligatory to use specific product group standards for sustainability. It was important to support Governments in developing a clear and

unambiguous national legal framework, in the absence of which procurement officials might hesitate to implement sustainable public procurement practices owing to concerns with compliance risk, vulnerability to fraud and corruption. The Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems can be used as a diagnostic tool to review public procurement systems and incorporates sustainability factors.

37.   Supreme audit institutions can play an important role in monitoring progress of sustainable public procurement programmes at the national level and adequate legislation should be in place to do so effectively. In addition to the Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems framework, the use of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 12.7.1 could be expanded to benchmark progress in the implementation of sustainable public procurement policies and action plans at all levels.

D.   Issues in public sector workforce management in the recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic

Conditions of service of frontline workers

38.   The Committee recalled that the COVID-19 crisis had exposed risks and vulnerabilities of Governments in terms of their unpreparedness for crises and inadequacies in public infrastructure investment. The pandemic had put the most visible pressure on the health sector, but workers performing many other essential functions that could not readily be carried out remotely had been affected, for example in public safety, education, social welfare, transport and sanitation. In addition, many frontline workers were under temporary contracts, which contributed to job insecurity.

39.   In the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, greater attention could be paid to ensuring that such jobs remained sufficiently attractive with adequate working conditions, respect for human rights and, where needed, alleviation from physical strain. Benefit and compensation schemes and employment contracts for all types of frontline workers could better reflect the risks that such workers faced. Adequate remuneration, based on competencies and effort, could also be given additional emphasis in strategic human resources management and would be essential to attracting competent workers to the public sector. Adequate remuneration could in turn contribute to the provision of high-quality public services.

Emergence of new work modalities

40.   A further lesson drawn from the pandemic was the need to broaden the scope of public sector labour relations and consider the changing nature of work, for example towards more flexible work arrangements and enhanced use of information and communication technologies, which could be observed in both the public and private sectors. The advent of alternate working arrangements continued to shed light on digital divides in the public sector. The Committee noted that public sector workers did not always have access to adequate equipment and infrastructure to perform their functions effectively. This raised a practical question as to whether expenses related to equipment, utilities and office space borne by public sector workers under new work arrangements should be compensated and, if so, under what conditions. Particular attention could be paid to public sector workers in low-income and conflicted countries and in rural and remote areas where digital gaps were most pronounced.

41.   Differences in digital competencies were observed across hierarchical levels, for example in situations where higher-ranking officials relied on technical support

from more junior staff. Given that an information and communications technology-enabled public administration was part of the foundation of sustainable development, digital literacy could be a helpful criterion in the recruitment of public sector workers while ensuring substantive equality of opportunity for all. Special attention could be paid to the local level, where the workforce as a whole often lagged behind the national Government in terms of digital literacy.

42. Promotion of gender equality was another area that called for attention. Women working from home often performed multiple tasks during the pandemic, for example working as a public servant, supervising children and managing housework all at the same time. While questions of gender equality and women's advancement went beyond conditions of work and contractual arrangements, nonetheless flexible work arrangements in the public sector could usefully take prevailing conditions into account and set an example for equitable inclusion of women in the broader labour force.

43. The Committee reiterated that Governments could benefit greatly from digitalized services and a strong online presence, acting in a timely fashion and expanding coverage of public services to all groups and geographic areas in the recovery to the pandemic. Advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data, with adequate regulatory, administrative and security safeguards and the capacity to manage and analyse information could help Governments improve their understanding of people's needs. Many Governments could accelerate efforts to strengthen the requisite information and communication technology capabilities in the public sector workforce.

Towards a humanistic style of leadership and management

44. A growing lack of trust in government could be observed in many countries in the wake of the pandemic. Regaining public trust could be fostered through capable leadership, dedication, empathy and professionalism in the public sector. The Committee emphasized that a sustainable recovery from the pandemic called for public services to be delivered with a focus on citizen-centricity alongside workforce management that was in harmony with people's expectations. A more humanistic style of leadership and management in government, putting a premium on empathy skills and emotional intelligence, was needed to address the complex challenges of sustainable development and achieve results under these conditions.

E. Building strong institutions for sustainable development in conflict-affected countries

Impact of the pandemic

45. The Committee observed that conflict-affected countries tended to have weak governance, poor-quality or partial institutions, contested sovereignty or violent conflict, as well as mistrust of Governments that had frequently failed to deliver high-quality – or sometimes any – services. Conflicts reduced GDP by an average of 2 per cent per year, and affected populations were less likely to be educated, have access to basic services and enjoy sustainable livelihoods. Lack of capacity in public administration and governance of institutions in conflict-affected countries remained a challenge.

46. The pandemic had exacerbated such challenges and increased pressure on already struggling institutions. Violent conflict itself tended to intensify the spread of infectious diseases in the absence of medical service provision, in contexts in which sanitation was often difficult and where there was rapid movement of displaced

persons. Such outbreaks severely threatened already stretched public services, affected some of the poorest and most vulnerable populations and could reverse their progress in development.

47. There were also opportunities for authorities and security services to become more oppressive, while at the same time there could be opportunities for non-State armed groups to take advantage of reduced attention or capability on behalf of government forces. For example, the closure of border crossings during lockdowns could provide a chance for Governments to increase control in fragile border areas, while at the same time providing an opportunity for informal border crossings controlled by non-State groups to emerge.

48. The reduction in the effectiveness of local peace approaches, including inclusive approaches to conflict resolution and justice, had been underscored during the pandemic. The restrictions on international travel and movement during the pandemic had created the need for better and more effective support to local management of peace processes. Local leaders and civil society organizations on the ground remained critical partners both in terms of peacebuilding and in terms of aiding vaccination programmes that relied on trust and legitimacy.

49. The Committee underscored that the proactive leadership of Governments was key to the recovery from the pandemic, for example in the enforcement of restrictions on movement to reduce transmission of the virus, provision of health care, economic support and the development of vaccines should be free of political considerations and respect international human rights and privacy norms.

50. Financing for mass vaccination efforts was urgent. The Committee suggested that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) could play a key role, for example by opening a vaccine financing window into the existing IMF rapid financing facility, through which countries could access funds for advance vaccine purchase. For successful distribution of vaccines, budgetary flexibility, transparency and accountability in the process and effective coordination among health authorities and other public institutions were indispensable.

51. The Committee underscored that enhancing the quality of public administration and the technical capacity of public servants should remain a priority in conflict-affected areas. Taking a conflict-sensitive approach, specifically not further exacerbating the exclusion of specific groups that might already be marginalized and whose conditions might have worsened during the pandemic, was critical to successful public sector involvement. Building trust between government and citizens, which would also be indispensable in rolling out mass vaccination programmes and reducing future grievances, was central to conflict sensitivity.

Building strong institutions to end violence against women and achieve gender equality

52. Sexual and gender-based violence had increased owing to the pandemic, including in some conflict-affected countries where security forces were empowered and had the opportunity to abuse their position. Greater attention could be given to building strong institutions to end violence against women and achieve gender equality in such settings and to ensuring that all vulnerable groups were protected.

53. The Committee noted the observation by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) that violence against women constituted a shadow pandemic. Women were not only the hardest hit by the pandemic, they were also the backbone of recovery in communities. Conflict spurred much higher rates of sexual violence, rendered women vulnerable to poverty, the loss of jobs, the destruction of assets such as homes and low-quality health services.

Recognizing that gender equality was a foundation of a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world, the Committee stressed that efforts to achieve gender equality and address the serious impact of violence and discrimination on women and girls, including internally displaced persons, refugees and indigenous women, went hand-in-hand with the building of strong institutions for sustainable development in such settings.

54.   The Committee took note of the case of Liberia, which had taken steps to combat gender-based violence by strengthening enforcement of a law on the punishment of perpetrators of domestic violence, designated a special prosecutor to handle cases of gender-based violence cases and set up a national sex offender registry. The Committee further noted that the Government had created a national security task force to handle sexual and gender-based violence. The national action plan on women and peace and security and the Spotlight Initiative were among other frameworks were aimed at protecting women's rights and promoting empowerment. The Committee also noted that a bottom-up approach to gender-based violence had been taken, whereby a small group of women had organized themselves into an advocacy group called Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, which had grown to become a political force against violence. The group had embarked on a sustained protest that had contributed to building peace.

Role of the media and fake news

55.   The Committee underscored that information was an area in which Governments could play an important role. Clear, verified information backed up by evidence was the key to overcoming challenges related to fake news and mistrust of government. Fake news undermined trust in the State and institutions, notably in areas where access to the Internet was limited and there were few opportunities to consider alternative sources of information. Three crucial factors could be considered in building trust: effectiveness in the delivery of accurate information, inclusiveness and engagement of all stakeholders; and accountability that ensured transparency and integrity.

Partnerships

56.   Partnerships at the global level and support in peacebuilding and financial aid from the international community continued to be critical in the recovery process from the pandemic in conflicted-affected countries. The Committee noted that the Peacebuilding Commission recognized the need to prioritize institution-building. It had also created space for national Governments to seek opportunities for South-South and triangular cooperation and for local level institutions and civil society organizations to present challenges in building and sustaining peace. Institutionalizing partnerships between the Commission and regional and subregional organizations, which often constituted key entry points for engaging with local, national and regional actors for peace, was important.

57.   The Committee noted that the Peacebuilding Fund supported countries to strengthen national and local institutions, including in areas of security sector reform, the rule of law, transitional justice, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, political dialogue, democratic governance, State capacities and extension of State authority.

58.   The Committee concluded that further study of the governance and public administration dimensions of these important areas of activity could be a relevant contribution.

Chapter IV
Future work of the Committee

59. The Committee will continue to align its work programme with the needs and priorities established by the Economic and Social Council, with a view to contributing effectively to the deliberations of the Council and assisting it in the performance of its functions. At its twenty-first session, the Committee will work on the theme that is adopted for the 2022 session of the Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development and prepare policy recommendations on the governance and institutional aspects of that issue.

60. Consideration could be given, inter alia, to questions of equitable government and distributive justice; effective public policy for sustainable and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; engaging youth in governance matters to promote decent work and inclusive economic growth; and building strong institutions to achieve gender equality. The Committee would further consider building strong institutions to combat climate change and its impacts and for the sustainable management, protection and restoration of natural resources within the context of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development, in particular the principles of transparency and participation.

61. The Committee also agreed that it would build on its previous analysis of building strong institutions for sustainable development in conflict-affected countries, taking into account the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including in the light of the serious financial, economic and institutional challenges faced by many of these countries, as well as institutional challenges related to migrants and refugees.

62. The Committee affirmed that the principles of effective governance for sustainable development, endorsed by the Council in July 2018, continued to provide a useful cross-cutting and interconnected framework for its work. At the twenty-first session, the Committee would consider the application of the principles at the subnational level.

63. In studying public financial management and budgeting, the Committee would consider issues related to investments in the health sector, publicly funded research, questions of cross-subsidization, policy changes in financial management to speed recovery and mobilize resources to strengthen implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, integrating the principles of effective governance in tax administration, public procurement processes and debt management, as well as matters relating to transparent, accountable and participatory budgeting for the Goals.

64. With regard to public sector workforce matters, the Committee was of the view that further attention was needed with regard to new modalities of work in the public sector, inequalities in compensation systems, subnational government workforce capacity, changes in public sector management to attract youth and issues pertaining to the politicization of the public service and its impact on the Sustainable Development Goals.

65. At its next session, the Committee would also examine issues in digital government with a focus on bridging the digital divide for an inclusive recovery from the pandemic, the readiness of institutions to take advantage of technology in the education and health sectors, new skills needed in leadership positions, the status of public sector workers in the information and communications technology field and the application of the principles of effective governance in digital government development with a view to designing systems that are consistent with international human rights and privacy norms.

66.   Finally, the Committee would again invite interested voluntary national review countries to engage in an interactive dialogue with the experts on institutional aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 16, taking into account interlinkages between Goal 16 and all the Goals and lessons learned from the voluntary national review, including efforts to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the Goals in the public sector.

67.   The Committee decided to continue the practice of organizing informal intersessional working groups to prepare the groundwork for its next session, bearing in mind the need to produce technical and expert analysis, assessments and policy recommendations to inform efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 72/305. Given the valuable experience that has been gained with the virtual meeting format, the Committee would continue to make use of the technology, notably during the intersessional period for virtual meetings of the working groups and related interactions with experts in preparation for the annual session at United Nations Headquarters.

68.   The ongoing contribution of observers was welcome, as was the engagement of young people interested in public service. The Committee would consider again dedicating part of the programme of work of its twenty-first session to an interactive consultation with observers and another part to a dialogue with youth organizations.

69.   The Committee decided to keep its methods of work under review and looked forward to continuing engagement with other subsidiary bodies of the Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and other United Nations processes, as appropriate, with a view to promoting linkages and informing the integrated view of the Council.

Annex I

List of documents

Agenda item	Title or description
2	Annotated provisional agenda (E/C.16/2021/1)
3	Note by the Secretariat transmitting the expert paper on building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic and timely implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (E/C.16/2021/2)
3	Contribution by the Committee to the 2021 thematic review of the high-level political forum on sustainable development
4	Conference room paper on dialogue with voluntary national review countries on Sustainable Development Goal 16
5	Executive summary of the African Peer Review Mechanism baseline study on the status of implementation of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development in Africa
5	Conference room paper on the implementation of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development in countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia
5	Conference room paper on the implementation of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development: the case of Kenya
6	Note by the Secretariat on integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national and subnational budgeting and financial management with a focus on Cabo Verde (E/C.16/2021/3)
7	Note by the Secretariat on sustainable public procurement in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development (E/C.16/2021/4)
8	Note by the Secretariat on issues in public sector workforce management in the recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic (E/C.16/2021/5)
9	Note by the Secretariat on building strong institutions for sustainable development in conflict-affected countries (E/C.16/2021/6)

Annex II

Correspondence and informal virtual meetings held during the twentieth session

The Secretary of the Committee, on behalf of the Director of the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government in his capacity as Chair pro tempore, transmitted a letter to all members of the Committee on 8 April 2021, conveying five nominations to the Bureau of the twentieth session that were received from the members during the intersessional period. With no objections raised under a silence procedure, the officers were deemed to have been elected by acclamation on 9 April. The Committee considered all items on the agenda through a combination of written consultations and informal meetings held from 12 to 21 April, using a virtual platform. It concluded by adopting the draft report on 21 April. The Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council, Juan Sandoval Mendiolea, and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Liu Zhenmin, made opening remarks.

Attendance

The following 21 members of the Committee participated in the informal virtual meetings of the session: Linda Bilmes (United States of America), Geert Bouckaert (Belgium), Upma Chawdhry (India), Emmanuelle d'Achon (France), Geraldine J. Fraser Moleketi (South Africa), Ali Hamsa (Malaysia), Ma Hezu (China), Paul Jackson (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), Bridget Katsriku (Ghana), Margaret Kobia (Kenya), Linus Toussaint Mendjana (Cameroon), Louis Meuleman (Netherlands), Lamia Moubayed Bissat (Lebanon), Juraj Nemec (Slovakia), Katarina Ott (Croatia), Regina Silvia Pacheco (Brazil), Ora-orn Poocharoen (Thailand), Gowher Rizvi (Bangladesh), Devon Rowe (Jamaica), Abdelhak Saihi (Algeria) and Henry Sardaryan (Russian Federation). Gregorio Montero (Dominican Republic) and Moni Pizani (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) were unable to participate.

Observers from intergovernmental, governmental non-governmental and related organizations were invited to provide written statements in advance of and during the session and to participate in a dedicated informal consultation with observers held on 19 April. The theme of the dialogue was "Building inclusive, effective and resilient institutions for sustainable recovery from COVID-19 and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals." Issues related to youth engagement, employment and decent work, sound policymaking and capacity development featured in the discussion. Approximately 40 observer entities were represented. The archived recording of the dialogue and written inputs of observers can be viewed on the web page of the Committee (https://publicadministration.un.org/en/cepa).

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